DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 393 774 SO 026 157

AUTHOR Parker, Franklin; Parker, Betty J.
TITLE Ezekiel Cheever (1614-1708), New England Colonial Teacher.
PUB DATE Jan 96
NOTE 8p.
PUB TYPE Historical Materials (060)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Colonial History (United States); Educational History; Elementary Secondary Education; *Primary Sources; Tutoring; *Tutors; United States History
IDENTIFIERS Boston Latin School MA; *Cheever (Ezekiel); *New England

ABSTRACT

This paper narrates the life of Ezekiel Cheever, the most famous colonial New England Latin grammar teacher of his time. Cheever came from middle class Puritan roots in England, receiving a classical education before emigrating to Boston (Massachusetts). His remarkably long teaching career of 70 years in four New England towns and the esteem shown by his famous pupils at his death tell much about how the New England colonial mind shaped U.S. education and thought. Cotton Mather preached at the funeral of Cheever, recalling the 23 years Cheever had taught in New Haven Colony (later named Connecticut), the 11 years in Ipswich (Massachusetts), the 9 years in Charlestown (Massachusetts), and the 37 years at the Boston Latin School (Massachusetts). (EH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Franklin Parker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

Ezekiel Cheever (1614-1708), New England Colonial Teacher

by Franklin and Betty J. Parker

[P.O. Box 100, Pleasant Hill, TN 38578, Ph. (615) 277-3268]

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED 393 774

Ezekiel Cheever was the most famous colonial New England Latin grammar teacher of his time. He came from middle class Puritan roots in England, where he received a classical education before emigrating to Boston. His remarkably long teaching career of 70 years in four New England towns and the esteem shown by his famous pupils at his death tell much about how the New England colonial mind shaped American education and thought.

Ezekiel Cheever was born in London, January 25, 1614, the son of William Cheaver (as he spelled his name), who made his living in the cloth trade. Family circumstances were good enough so that Ezekiel received a classical secondary education that prepared him for Emmanuel College, Cambridge University. One account says he attended a secondary school attached to Christ's Hospital in 1624. By another account, about which there is some doubt, he attended the well known St. Paul's School in London.

If he attended the school near Christ's Hospital, located at Newgate Street, London, it was originally the priory (or residence) of the Grey Friars. On that location a school was founded in 1553 by King Edward VI to support poor orphans. The school was commonly called the Blue Coat School after the blue uniform pupils wore. When fully enrolled, the school annually boarded and taught from 1,000 to 1,200 boys and a few girls who entered at ages 8 to 10 and left at ages 15 or 16. Each year five or six of the best pupils were sent to enroll in colleges at Oxford or Cambridge universities.

If Cheever attended St. Paul's School, he was in good company. England's famous poet John Milton, six years older than Cheever, also attended St. Paul's. St. Paul's was an endowed grammar school founded in 1509 (or 1512 by one source) by John Colet, famous humanist scholar, who founded it originally for the free education of poor children.

The colleges making up Cambridge University attracted such future leaders as Oliver Cromwell, who headed the Puritan Revolution in England. Other Cambridge-educated Puritans who left England for the New World and became leaders in America included William Brewster, John Winthrop, and John Cotton. John Milton entered Christ's College, Cambridge University, in 1625. Ezekiel

SP 026157

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Cheever entered Emmanuel College, Cambridge University, eight years later in 1633.

Emmanuel College was founded as a Puritan institution in 1584 and was the model for Harvard College in Cambridge, Massachusetts. John Harvard, a Puritan and Emmanuel College graduate (1635), left for New England where he worked as an assistant pastor. His important gift of half of his estate and his library of 320 books led to the founding in 1636 of Harvard College at Cambridge, near Boston, Massachusetts, named in his honor.

Ezekiel Cheever arrived in Boston in June 1637. He came to the New World, like many before and since, for religious freedom and economic opportunity. He was 23 years old and single. Boston was then only seven years old. Two years before his arrival in Boston there was founded in that town, on April 23, 1635, the New World's first college-preparatory secondary school, the Boston Latin Grammar School (still active as the Boston Latin School), where Cheever taught for the last 37 of his 70 years as a teacher.

Cheever's first stay in Boston lasted only one year. He left in 1638 for the New Haven Colony, later named Connecticut, perhaps because, like Roger Williams before him, he disliked the rigid Puritan state-church atmosphere in the Boston area. In New Haven, where he was among the earliest founding settlers, Cheever began the first of his 70 years as a teacher. He taught Latin, first in his own home and later in a school house built for him. He married Mary (last name not known) and with the New Haven leaders signed the "Plantation Covenant" in Newman's barn, June 4, 1639, a compact which formed New Haven's religious and civic government. He received £20 for his teaching in 1641. This amount was raised to £30 in August 1644.

Although of very modest means when he went to New Haven (Cheever's estate was then listed as worth £20), the esteem in which he was held as a teacher can be seen in the fact that in 1643 his name was listed sixth among the planters of New Haven . This respect can also be seen from his being chosen one of the twelve deacons in the New Haven church, from his being deputized to represent his district in the general court in 1646, and from his being occasionally asked to preach at New Haven's First Church. He was respected as a teacher for his scholarly knowledge of Latin and Greek and also for his firm discipline, considered essential in colonial education. One of his pupils in New Haven who later became a well known minister and poet was Michael Wigglesworth.

But Cheever was also known as a man of strong independent mind, as shown in an incident of censure in New Haven in 1649. Some elders of the New Haven community were criticized for "partiality and usurpation"; that is, for having done some act or deed the community frowned upon. Many wanted the accused tried and disciplined. When the case was presented before church leaders, the accused individuals were cleared. Cheever, observing the proceedings, expressed strong disagreement with the verdict. Because of his independent stand, he was criticized by the church elders and censured for his "uncomely gestures and carriage before the church." His own defense sounds better than the charges made against him. His arguments made some of the church leaders doubt that they had made the right decision. In ringing words he said to the church elders, "I had rather suffer anything from men than make shipwreck of a good conscience, or go against my present light."

His wife Mary died the year of this trial, 1649, leaving him with five children. One child, named Ezekiel after him, had died in infancy. In 1650 he left New Haven after 12 years as its schoolteacher. It was probably while in New Haven that he wrote a Latin grammar textbook whose shortened title was *Accidence*. It was a highly popular textbook in colonial Latin grammar schools and was used long after his death in 1708. The eighteenth edition was published in 1785 and the twentieth edition was published in 1838.

While Cheever taught in New Haven, the Massachusetts General Court passed two important school laws. The Massachusetts School Law of 1642 required parents and masters to teach their children to read and write, on penalty of paying a fine. This law reflected the Calvinists' desire for universal elementary education for moral and religious purposes. To understand the Bible, children had to learn to read. This law was based on the English Poor Law of 1601, which laid down England's policy for the welfare of lower class children. This English law required pauper and orphan children to be apprenticed to a trade and stipulated that their masters see to their moral and religious welfare.

Two years later the Massachusetts School Law of 1647 went further. It required every town of 50 homes or more to employ an elementary school teacher, and every town of 100 or more homes to have a Latin grammar school. This 1647 law has been popularly called the Old Deluder Satan Law, after its quaint wording which said that since the Old Deluder Satan tried to keep men and women from reading the Bible, the best way to fight the devil was to promote schools and learning.

Even though these two school laws were not strictly enforced, they marked the first time an English-speaking legislature anywhere in the world had declared in favor of universal elementary and secondary education. The year Cheever left New Haven, 1650, Connecticut passed a school law which incorporated the main features of the Massachusetts school laws of 1642 and 1647.

In December 1650 Cheever went to Ipswich, Massachusetts, where he taught for 11 years. His school, endowed with grants of land and bequests, was called a free school but still required fees from pupils' parents. There Cheever taught Latin and Greek to prepare boys for college. His teaching fame spread and helped make Ipswich more widely known. In 1652 he married his second wife, Ellen Lathrop, who had come from England two years earlier to live with her brother. The Cheevers had four children in Ipswich. In 1653 a philanthropic citizen gave the town a better school building and provided a house for Cheever with a few acres of land.

In November 1661 Cheever went to Charlestown, Massachusetts, as its teacher at a salary of £30 a year. He was not always paid, however, and in November 1666 he petitioned the selectmen of the town for his salary, mentioning that "the constables were much behind with him" (meaning that he might be jailed for his debts). He asked that the school building be repaired. He also complained that the agreement under which he was hired to teach was that he would be the only teacher in town. But, now, a Mr. Mansfield was taking pupils away from him. In 1669 he petitioned for land on which to build his hme. The selectmen voted him the land, but Cheever left the next year after nine years of teaching in Charlestown.

On January 6, 1670, when Cheever was 56 years old and had taught for more than 30 years, he became schoolmaster of the Boston Latin Grammar School, where he remained for 38 years until his death in 1708. The still-existing Boston Latin School (as it is now called) was founded February 13, 1635, a year before the founding of Harvard College (1636). This Boston Latin School, the oldest and best known grammar school in New England, is believed to have been founded through the influence of John Cotton and based on the school John Cotton knew called the High School in Boston, Lincolnshire, England, founded in 1554. John Cotton came to Boston, Massachusetts, in 1633, and helped found the Boston Latin School two years later (1635), one year before the founding of Harvard College. John Cotton's will provided that half of his estate go the "Free School of Boston." Philemon Pormort was the Boston Latin School's first master. It was early supported by the

town of Boston. Five signers of the Declaration of Independence and four presidents of Harvard College attended the Boston Latin School. Its many famous pupils read like a who's who of New England and included Benjamin Franklin, Cotton Mather, John Hancock, Samuel Adams, Edward Everett, Robert C. Winthrop, Charles Francis Adams, Charles Sumner, William M. Evarts, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Wendell Phillips, John Lothrop Motley, Francis Parkman, Henry Ward Beecher, Charles W. Eliot, Edward Everett Hale, and others. More recent Boston Latin School graduates include philosophers George Santayana and Bernard Berenson, journalist Theodore H. White, and education-writer Jonathan Kozol.

Cheever's last 37 years of teaching at Boston Latin School established his reputation as the most famous teacher in the colonies. His salary was £60 a year, then a very good salary. Elijah Corlet, a schoolmaster of the Latin grammar school in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and almost as well-known a teacher as Cheever, earned only £20 a year.

The school room in which Cheever taught was large and received little light from its high, small windows. Smoke from the large fireplace at one end of the room often drifted over the heads of the pupils and blackened the ceiling. Copying or listening, the pupils sat on long fixed benches with fixed desks in front of them. Cheever wore a black skullcap on his gray head and his white beard was long and pointed. The boys always knew when he was angry because he would start stroking his beard to the point faster and faster. The rod of birch twigs hung nearby. Cheever's school was open mornings from 7 to 11 in summer and from 8 to 11 in winter and in the afternoons from 1 to 5. Boys learned their Latin from his *Accidence* and read the New Testament in Greek.

Cheever, who had seen many generations of boys come and go, knew that those who learned their Latin and Greek would go on to one of the colonial colleges and become mainly ministers or physicians. During Cheever's lifetime three colonial colleges were founded by the established churches in three colonies. Harvard College was founded in 1636 at Cambridge, Massachusetts, by the Puritans and named after John Harvard because of his early gift. William and Mary College was founded in 1693 in Williamsburg, Virginia, 1693, by the Anglicans. Yale College in New Haven, Connecticut, was founded in 1701 by the Puritans.

American colleges did not cluster at great learning centers as in England's Oxford and Cambridge universities but were small and scattered. This diffusion of colleges was aided by the Great Awakening, whose resulting revivals and

evangelism led to splits in the Congregational, Presbyterian, and Baptist churches, splits that aided the spread of American higher education.

The fourth colonial college, Princeton College, founded in 1746 as the College of New Jersey, was founded by "New Side" Presbyterians. The fifth colonial college, Brown College, was founded in 1764 by Revivalist Baptists in Providence, Rhode Island. The sixth colonial college, Rutgers College, originally called Queen's College, was founded in New Brunswick, New Jersey, in 1766 by Theodore J. Frelinghuysen and his followers of the Dutch Reformed Church. The seventh colonial college, Dartmouth College, 1769, in Hanover, New Hampshire, grew out of an Indian missionary school organized with visiting English Anglican evangelist George Whitfield's help by Eleazar Wheelock, Congregational pastor. The eighth colonial college, King's College, later Columbia University, was founded by Anglicans in New York in 1754. The ninth college founded before the Revolution was the secular College of Philadelphia, later the University of Pennsylvania, based on the first academy in America, founded by Benjamin Franklin in 1755.

Cheever knew that those pupils who did not do well in their classical languages would become farmers, shopkeepers, merchants, or go to sea on sailing ships. For those trades they needed a little more arithmetic. Little history, geography, or literature were taught. The curriculum of the Latin grammar schools aimed at college entrance; and the entrance requirements at Harvard College were to read Tully or another classical Latin author in the original, write and speak Latin verse and prose, and be able to decline Greek nouns and verbs.

When his pupils grew in number, Cheever hired and paid his own assistant. In March 1699, when Cheever was 85, the selectmen voted to pay his assistant, Ezekiel Lewis, £40 a year, raising this to £45 in 1701. Cheever's second wife died in 1706. He lived his last two years with his youngest daughter Susannah and her husband. Of his children Cheever was particularly proud of his son Samuel, a minister, who was well known and much respected.

Cheever's last illness came in August of 1708, in his seventieth year of teaching. On August 12, after going out to hear his old pupil, Cotton Mather, preach, he became ill. On August 13 his friend, Judge Sewall, another successful former pupil, who had arranged for an old age pension for Cheever, went to see him. Cheever, in bed, blessed the judge. On August 19 Sewall called again and Cheever took him by the hand several times. On August 20 Sewall called to find Cheever much weaker. In a very low voice Cheever called for his daughter and

asked those in the room if they were ready for his end. He died early in the morning of August 21, 1708. He was 94 years old.

Cheever's funeral was attended by many people of all stations of life, including the governor, councilors, ministers, and justices, most of whom had been his pupils. Cotton Mather preached a long funeral sermon for his old schoolmaster. He recalled Cheever's long and distinguished teaching career: 23 years in New Haven, 11 years in Ipswich, nine years in Charlestown, and 37 years at Boston Latin School. Cotton Mather told how he and his classmates were taught by Cheever an oration by the Roman orator Tully praising his (Tully's) schoolmaster; and how Cheever taught them Corderius's *Colloquies* and the fact that Corderius had himself taught the great John Calvin. Mather praised Cheever's scholarship, dedication as a teacher, and piety; and ended with "He Dyed, a Candidate for the First Resurrection."

Cheever left behind an estate of £837, 19 shillings, and 6 pence. He also left behind him a legend of 74 years of teaching. His thousands of pupils remembered him as the most famous teacher in colonial New England.

The Latin grammar school was inherited from Europe via England as the first type of secondary school in colonial America, from 1635. It was succeeded by the more practical academy, introduced by Benjamin Franklin in Philadelphia, 1751. The academy was succeeded by the high school after 1821 and especially after the 1872 Kalamazoo, Michigan, decision legalizing use of tax funds for public high schools.

END